

Report of the ENQA working group on stakeholder involvement in quality assurance practices

2014

ENQA Working Group on stakeholder involvement

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Introduction

One of the collateral benefits of the implementation of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education (ESG) has been the wide involvement of students in external quality assurance practices. An example of this can be seen in the ENQA Board's decision to involve student representatives – appointed by the European Students' Union (ESU) – in the expert panels of ENQA-coordinated external reviews of agencies, and has served as a stimulus for involving students in the work of many quality assurance (QA) agencies throughout Europe.

The reflection about how to actively involve other stakeholders as a general trend should be placed at the forefront of the external quality assurance processes, using the good practice derived from student involvement.

Stakeholders' involvement is mentioned in the Bucharest ministerial communiqué as one of the ministers' commitments:

*We commit to both maintaining the public responsibility for quality assurance and to **actively involve a wide range of stakeholders in this development**. We acknowledge the ENQA, ESU, EUA and EURASHE (the E4 group) report on the implementation and application of the "European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance" (ESG). (...) The revision will be based upon an initial proposal to be prepared by the E4 in cooperation with Education International, BUSINESSEUROPE and the European Quality Assurance Register for HE (EQAR) (...).*

Purpose and objectives of the working group

The working group on stakeholders' involvement in quality assurance practices was created to **take stock of the current involvement** of stakeholders across Europe and investigate **how to deepen engagement**, especially for those stakeholders whose involvement is weak but nevertheless important, for example, employers. Indeed, the Bucharest communiqué emphasised the need to engage with employer-related organisations.

The two main purposes of the working group were to initiate a debate to **identify new ways of promoting the active involvement** of the different stakeholders related to the external quality assurance processes within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) - apart from higher education institutions (HEIs) - as well as to **map existing features of good practice** from different academic and professional traditions all over Europe. The ultimate goal of the working group was to define ways of improving stakeholder involvement from a European perspective, while being sensitive to the national contexts.

With a view to making recommendations to the Board of ENQA and to nationally based ENQA member agencies on how both can develop and deepen stakeholder engagement, the working group focused on the different levels of involvement established in the EHEA among the following stakeholders:

- **Students.** The beginning of the second round of external reviews of QA agencies against the ESG coordinated by ENQA requires an analysis of the lessons learned and a reflection for improving their involvement within a more mature setting;
- **Academic staff.** The peer-review approach helps to consider the involvement of the academic staff of HEIs as something largely achieved. The active participation of academic representatives as peers in external quality assurance processes could distort the real involvement of academic staff in a broader sense. Furthermore, this participation could also foster the professionalisation of a certain profile of "external quality assurance academic-expert".

- **Representatives from professional bodies/employers.** The implementation of the Bologna Process and its commitment to student employability from bachelor's to doctoral levels necessitates a reflection on the involvement of representatives from professional bodies and employers. This approach favours the use of a different *off-site* perspective on external quality assurance processes, avoiding inbreeding analysis.

The working group is chaired by Rafael Llavori, Head of the Unit for International Relations at ANECA, and coordinated by the ENQA Secretariat. The working group was open to ENQA members and affiliates, and included the following members:

Stephanie Bernhardt	Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (ACQUIN)	Germany
Sonia Cardoso	Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES)	Portugal
Ferdije Etemi	Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA)	Kosovo
Carolien Hennekam	Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO)	The Netherlands
Stephanie Hering	Swiss Center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (OAQ)	Switzerland
Richard Jarman	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)	United Kingdom
Rafael Llavori	National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education of Spain (ANECA)	Spain
Almantas Serpatauskas	Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC)	Lithuania
Erika Soboleva	Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance and Career Development (AKKORK)	Russia
Maiki Udam	Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency (EKKA)	Estonia
Luis Carlos Velón Sixto	Agency for Quality Assurance in the Galician University System (ACSUG)	Spain
Maria E. Weber	Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria)	Austria
Paul Zevenbergen	Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO)	The Netherlands

Chapter I. Definition of “stakeholder” and “involvement”

More than defining the words “stakeholder” and “involvement”, the working group raised some interesting issues regarding the nature of stakeholders and their engagement in terms of active participation in quality assurance activities, as a second stage or step in the ongoing development of the Bologna Process. It is about the need to rethink and redefine the concept and the scope of stakeholders in quality assurance of higher education in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) aiming at a next generation of stakeholders involved in quality assurance practices. It is not only about “who”, which was clearly stated in the communiqué: EUA, EURASHE, ESU, and ENQA, plus Business Europe, Education International, and EQAR, but above all about “how” this involvement – considered very successful in general terms albeit with geographical differences and variations in the intensity– can be enhanced.

How can the working group contribute to identifying new ways to promote and favour stakeholder involvement in quality assurance practices? Of course, there is no need to add or replace stakeholders’ official representativeness, nor become the body in charge of granting the status of stakeholder to any organisation. Rather, the methodology of the project will focus on what has been successfully achieved in terms of involvement and how it could be recognised as a good practice to be adapted in other contexts. For this reason it was considered important that the working group have enough diversity in terms of geographic representation and higher education systems in place.

The very first meeting led to a quick analysis of the state of the art of stakeholder involvement in the EHEA, as outlined in the following sections.

1.1 Students: a second stage?

There was strong agreement that the participation of students and student unions in the EHEA was deemed a successful model and an absolutely European feature of quality assurance when viewed from a global perspective. In Europe, students actively participate in external quality assurance processes, including ENQA-coordinated external reviews and those conducted by QA agencies within various countries. But is that enough? Is there still room for improvement when considering student involvement in quality assurance practices?

The working group members agreed that a “one-size-fits-all” scenario concerning student involvement is not possible; special needs and contexts need to be taken into account when approaching a second stage of engagement. A range of possibilities for the short term were easily identified by the following open questions:

- Specific profiles for specialised processes? (postgraduate, doctoral, research-oriented evaluations)
- Is there life (involvement) beyond graduation?
- Alumni: a possible character to complement the play?
- Is there an intermediate category between student and academic staff (post-doc positions) and professional practitioners?
- Are there initiatives appropriate for particular evaluation contexts: research, doctoral, institutional?
- Are there any good practices at this stage to share and disseminate among ENQA’s members and affiliates?

The working group agreed on identifying particular cases based on evaluation procedures in national and discipline-specific settings, which could be analysed and eventually communicated with ENQA’s membership as conclusions from the group.

1.2 Academic staff: more than peers

The discussion concerning academic involvement led almost immediately to one surrounding the participation of academics as peers in the evaluation procedures of QA agencies. The incorporation of Education International as an explicit stakeholder within the Bologna Process required a much more careful analysis of how such an important actor could really play a part regarding quality assurance activities.

The first question to be addressed is: Is there a policy for involving academics in quality assurance processes internally and externally? Having one can contribute to strengthening the expansion or even the implementation of a quality culture within HEIs going far beyond the individuals or groups of professors who are already contributing to quality assurance procedures. A further structured survey could identify some practices to mobilise academics beyond peer reviews and evaluation committees.

The working group agreed that establishing a communication channel with Education International in the future could improve this particular involvement.

1.3 Employers and professional bodies

The involvement of employers was not well developed in most of the agencies with a more comprehensive profile. Their counterparts focusing more on discipline-specific or sectorial approach took them more into consideration.

Some members of the group raised concerns in their countries about the negative perception from academic staff and students relating to the involvement of employers and employer's organisations with HEIs - a kind of a "loss of innocence" still remaining in some academic circles which view higher education as a pristine realm of knowledge apart from the labour market.

Beyond this particular issue, the group considered that the main challenges were twofold: how to turn the abovementioned sectorial involvement into a much more general one and how to overcome mindset obstacles or biases coming from common misunderstandings between higher education and employer sectors.

Most of the agencies of the working group's members include representatives of professional bodies or practitioners in their evaluation panels, and some agencies include representatives in their boards or advisory bodies.

All the agencies agree that employers and professional associations are key actors with regard to employability. Therefore, a direct link with programme design should be assured in order to achieve better labour-oriented programmes. If this issue is important for the institutions when designing their programmes, it has also to be taken into account by the QA agencies in their procedures when appointing representatives from this sector in their evaluation panels. The level and depth of such involvement varies among the agencies, and it has to be analysed by the working group in order to identify good practices at the level of both evaluation panels and board members.

The experience provided by the consultants' groups for the design and implementation of the national qualifications frameworks in different countries were raised as a contrasting good practice to be thought of in the context of quality assurance.

The last point discussed the involvement of employers and professional bodies focusing on the particular role that the representatives from these stakeholders should play in the quality assurance generalised agencies in comparison with the discipline-oriented accreditation organisations such as those devoted to engineering, chemistry, or medical specialities.

The group agreed on the need for further discussion on this topic to find a way to favour the involvement of employers and professional representatives in generalised QA agencies, adding value to their procedures and reports but avoiding at the same time giving an excessive weight to this perspective regarding the academic-based approach.

Finally, a proposal of expected outputs for the working group was set up by the members:

- Identifying good practices to reinforce the involvement of stakeholders at the agency/national level
- Stocktaking of good practices: a first draft
- Discussing the first conclusions from the mapping of good practices with stakeholders
- Redefining new roles to be played by the stakeholders in quality assurance practices
- Preparing an ENQA report on stakeholder involvement in quality assurance practices according to the new context derived from the Bucharest Communiqué

Chapter II. Methodology

2.1 Stocktaking document

The working group identified the range of stakeholders who are engaged: the general public; prospective students, existing students, and alumni; academics; and employers, their representative

bodies (for example, trade unions), and professional and statutory bodies (PSRBs) – for example, bodies representing professions such as architecture, engineering, and medicine.

The first exercise performed by the working group was a sort of a stocktaking assessment on the state of the art in each country or context in which their agency is operating. The stocktaking was a useful exercise in comparing and contrasting the ways in which QA agencies engage various stakeholders across Europe. A shared threshold of engagement appeared, with considerable engagement seen from universities and colleges, higher education bodies, students, and PSRBs. Engagement with employers and employer representative bodies appears, however, weak across Europe. While the Bucharest Communiqué emphasises the importance of engaging with employer-related organisations, the working group was conscious of opinions from the higher education sector which declare it is not a slave of the market. This led to a dialogue about the value of higher education as a public good.

- Students: are QA agencies champions of the sector or champions of the user, the student? Is the aim to be transparent, that they serve both? QA agencies are champions of quality. To what extent are students engaged in HEIs?
 - Switzerland – very much so – but do QA agencies expect too much of students? They are at university in order to study.
 - Netherlands – yes and no – depends on institution.
 - Germany – internal processes and at institutional level; sometimes at programme level
 - UK – depends – more established HEIs have better track record. Engagement is less with private providers and in further education colleges which provide higher education.
 - Spain – students are involved in external assessment. Engagement in internal quality assurance processes depends on each HEI.
 - Estonia – involvement depends on the institution. Some academics are sceptical that students give added value.
 - There is a need for quality assurance by “students as learners”, not only students as quality experts.
- Prospective students: what is the role of prospective students, their advisers, and families in quality assurance? In Portugal, the QA agency ensures that its information is transparent and available to prospective students via the ministry.
- Alumni: it was pointed out that in UK and Netherlands the employment destinations/ employment prospects of graduates are used as an indicator of the quality of the HEIs. In UK, for example, institutions have been compelled since autumn 2012 to identify employability skills the students will gain from his or her course of study.
- The general public: how do we define this group and why engage them? The public have a general interest in the success of their higher education sector; they may be graduates or have family who are or will be students; they are taxpayers who fund the sector. In the Netherlands the aim is to have 50 percent of the population educated at the higher education level – the public interest is therefore clear.
- How do QA agencies engage further with those whom are engaged already? How can we learn from each other?
- Are the organisations with whom QA agencies engage truly representative of the groups they claim to represent?
- Are there other stakeholder groups with whom QA agencies should be engaging but are not currently?
- Again, the importance of what is meant by “involvement”, why it is important, and the different types of involvement were raised by the members of the working group as a starting point to find results to be shared.

The working group considered that a survey of stakeholders' involvement should be devised and disseminated to stakeholders at both the national and ENQA level, the findings of which will inform recommendations to the ENQA Board.

2.2 Survey

In January 2013, the working group convened to discuss the draft survey to be used by its members (draft attached in Appendix 1). Although the survey should be adapted to accommodate a wide range of QA agencies, the members agreed on a number of shared points to try to develop a standard survey which would be analysed commonly despite the QA agencies' differences in focus and scope. The questionnaire should be translated into each country's language and sent to the stakeholders. Therefore, the QA agencies had the added responsibility not only of translating the questions but also the responses for the subsequent report.

The respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire in writing. Upon receipt of the completed questionnaire, the Working Group members considered whether a phone interview with the respondents was necessary. The completed questionnaire thus served as a basis to open the dialogue and gain a deeper analysis.

Each member of the Working Group identified which stakeholders were to be contacted, with alumni and professional organisations included where relevant. A list of stakeholders to be addressed by each agency was circulated to the whole group for information purposes. The results were individually analysed by each agency before the Working Group as a whole performed a joint analysis of the results.

The Working Group were aware of the difficulties in terms of the questionnaire's terminology and, above all, the understanding by the various stakeholders of the questions and technical words. Nevertheless, the Working Group agreed that these contextual differences in understanding could be identified by the particular agency and clarified in either the introduction to its part or as a footnote where necessary. The members agreed that it was crucial that the questionnaire focus on short and clear questions in a brief survey format in order to allow the Working Group to analyse the information easily and to identify any emerging patterns.

The Working Group decided to define a practical approach to the issue of involvement of stakeholders at this stage which consists of:

- Examining the scope and nature of stakeholder participation in quality assurance
- Identifying the various stakeholders in each country and QA agency
- Making recommendations to QA agencies and the Board of ENQA for improvement, based on a contextualised approach in each country with all the particularities involved and bearing in mind generalisations concerning particular stakeholders should be made carefully

The mechanism to approach the issue, a brief qualitative questionnaire with seven questions for stakeholders and four for HEIs, was chosen to make a first approach to draw information from a variety of agencies with very different profiles. The results reflected a highly uneven response in number of stakeholders depending on the country. Some agencies had to replace the "written" version with an oral survey by telephone. In some cases the silences were "very expressive" in terms of interpretation of both the existing relations and the room for improvement.

The Working Group agreed on the need to:

- broaden the definition of stakeholder beyond those identified in the EHEA,
- adapt the messages sent by the QA agencies to different audiences (social media), and
- make a contextual analysis in each country with a more concrete tool and survey.

The Working Group concluded that the results allowed the possibility of drawing general conclusions for ENQA members.

Chapter III. Outcomes of the survey

3.1 Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (ACQUIN) – Germany

Higher Education Institutions

Extent of involvement in quality assurance practices

Concerning HEIs, the academic staff is involved in quality assurance processes via their participation in different internal committees but also external ones like those of QA agencies. Further involvement occurs via high quality of teaching and via internal and external evaluation – in particular, accreditation procedures. The non-academic staff is responsible for administrative support in all issues concerning the implementation of quality assurance procedures. That means providing support of external and internal accreditation procedures (in particular writing the self-reports with assistance from the academic staff), providing information about all regulations (e.g. by maintaining the intranet portal), evaluating surveys, preparing for and post processing of committee meetings, and taking part in external workshops and conferences.

Benefits of involvement in quality assurance practices

Accreditation procedures are seen as an appropriate instrument of monitoring whether the status quo of teaching and learning is being kept on the level of subject and formally. Surveys from students (internal feedback) and alumni and employers (external feedback) are seen as appropriate instruments for receiving feedback. Surveys help HEIs to determine if the aims of the institution and its programmes are ensured and if external requirements are implemented.

Improvement of involvement in quality assurance practices being seen

Even if benefits of quality assurance are mentioned, the need for improvement still remains. The questioned administrative quality assurance managers conveyed their wish for more involvement in the sense of more co-determination. Generally, there seems to be dissatisfaction about overloading the quality assurance managers with tasks divided into small sections. Also the reporting and control mechanisms should be reduced both from the external accreditation agencies and from the internal central administrative units of the HEIs. The reporting system should be improved to the effect that it is made clear what action is required. Often criticised is the lack of information and communication between not only the administrative units themselves but also between the administration and professors. It is observed that often there is still a lack of feedback about the performance of the professors and president. Also, there are often no penalties for those professors who refuse to take part in quality assurance practices. All in all there is seen a lack of positive incentives that could lead to a higher commitment concerning the implementation of suitable quality assurance processes.

Students

Extent of involvement in quality assurance practices

Students involve themselves in quality assurance practices by participating in internal and external committees (like those in QA agencies), in being members of internal and external student organisations, and in taking part in accreditation procedures as peers. There is also the so-called “students’ accreditation pool” that trains students for taking part in accreditation procedures as peers and also nominates peers.

Benefits of involvement in quality assurance practices

It was positively mentioned that with quality assurance, the study programmes can be reflected upon, improved, and optimised, especially in matters of academic feasibility, the recognition and crediting of academic performance, and modularisation. Also it is positively seen that all relevant

documents are checked for correctness and completeness. External quality assurance is often seen as more effective, as there is no influence from internal conflicts. The involvement of students ensures the students' views are considered.

Improvement of involvement in quality assurance practices being seen

It is criticised that often the expertise of students is not taken seriously or that students' opinions have no impact on decisions. Some students also have the impression that the knowledge of professors about quality assurance is heterogeneous and suggest that there should be mandatory further education for professors concerning development of study programmes and aspects of the Bologna Process. Important is that evaluation takes place anonymously. In study programmes with few students (which often is the case at colleges of arts and music) it is often thought that the personal contact between students and professors is adequate to give honest feedback. However, this is often a misperception, because it is especially difficult in small classes to balance between giving suggestions that might not be willingly heard and containing oneself to avoid irritation. Therefore, it is suggested to develop a procedure for quality assurance also for small study programmes that allows honest feedback, thereby giving students the security not to experience disadvantages by expressing criticism. From the students' points of view it is also important that it is obligatory for each HEI to have a permanent quality manager with fixed consultation hours and who is assisted by a student. Both must be involved in all relevant decision-making processes. Constant and anonymous evaluations are necessary to create confidence and to have the possibility to incorporate changes. Collected data and survey results should always be published.

Employers

Extent of involvement in quality assurance practices

The Confederation of German Employers' Associations nominates and assists employers in the Accreditation Council (the central decision-making body of the "Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programmes in Germany"). Also, it participates in working groups of the council and nominates peers for the accreditation procedures of QA agencies. Some representatives are also members of university advisory councils.

Regional employers' associations and regional employers also have representatives who are members of university advisory councils, especially in those universities that offer study programmes in close cooperation with companies. Some representatives are also members of committees of QA agencies and nominate peers for accreditation procedures or are peers by themselves. It is not seen as necessary to centrally coordinate the search for peers for accreditation procedures; this is seen to be the responsibility of the QA agencies only.

Benefits of involvement in quality assurance practices

Not only in external quality assurance practices but also in internal ones just the external point of view is able to deliver information to detect quality deficits and develop innovative solutions. Furthermore, just in interaction between HEIs and employers the following questions can be answered: What connections exist between study programmes and professional life? How are the students being helped by finding a proper job after finishing university? In what way can a connection be established between study programme and professional life? In what way does the transfer of knowledge between research and the regional economy work? The exchange between HEIs and employers about new study concepts is seen as very important. Employers who are involved as peers in accreditation procedures appreciate gaining an overview about the quality of study programmes.

Improvement of involvement in quality assurance practices being seen

There is already a broad involvement of employers' representatives in the advisory boards of universities and committees of QA agencies. However, this practice is not yet widespread. It is the duty of each HEI to involve employers in their practices.

Labour unions

Extent of involvement in quality assurance practices

Labour unions and their members participate in quality assurance practices by taking part in accreditation procedures as peers, by having representatives in the Accreditation Council and in some accreditation agencies.

Benefits of involvement in quality assurance practices

Quality of teaching and learning can be improved from the point of the employee's view. The interests of the students and employees are not only represented in HEIs but also in the public and private economy. Labour unions can have an impact on qualification aims, the rules of quality assurance procedures, standards, and criteria. By being organised in a network at the national level, some labour unions are able to contribute to comparable quality assurance practices. The network holds regular meetings during which the development of quality assurance practices is discussed and which trainings for members to be peers in accreditation procedures are conducted.

Improvement of involvement in quality assurance practices being seen

From the point of the employees' views both employees and employers should be involved in peer groups at the same time. It should be possible to take part in quality assurance practices as peers without the burden of any disadvantages, especially financially ones. HEIs should be obliged to involve professional fields in the (further) development of study programmes.

3.2 Agency for Quality Assurance in the Galician University System (ACSUG) – Spain **Higher Education Institutions**

Extent of involvement in quality assurance practices

In Galicia, the Universities are represented in the Board of Directors of ACSUG. The Galician universities consider their involvement as high, because they are represented in the ACSUG Board of Directors and they have taken part actively in all the evaluation activities launched by ACSUG since its origin in 2001. The universities have participated in the implementation of quality assurance processes in the university in different topics, such as evaluation of teaching staff, follow-up of degrees, internal quality assurance systems, etc.

Benefits of involvement in quality assurance practices

The Galician universities consider that their participation in quality assurance practices improve universities by:

- improving transparency,
- having mechanisms to evaluate and improve the teaching staff activity,
- implementing internal quality assurance systems in all the Galician university centers, and
- monitoring degrees easily and improving academic studies.

They find it very important to highlight the labour market studies carried out by ACSUG, to show the objectivity of the results and transparency of the Galician University System.

Improvements in the involvement in quality assurance practices

Although the universities mention that their involvement is high, it would be very important for them to integrate all assessment processes in the university. In order to establish this implementation in a systematic, efficient, and sustainable way, the active participation of all the stakeholders is needed, and it is very important to simplify tools and processes.

Others comment that the most important stage of collaboration for universities is during the design of the evaluation processes. In this way it would be easier to adapt the processes to the current situation of the universities and society.

Employers

Extent of involvement in quality assurance practices

Representatives of employers take part in the consultative bodies of the universities and in the ACSUG advisory board. The universities usually sign agreements with the employers regarding some topics, such as practices for students, research projects, etc.

Benefits of involvement in quality assurance practices

The employers consider that their involvement in the quality assurance practices have a direct impact on the quality of the competences acquired by students in the Galician higher education system.

Improvements in the involvement in quality assurance practices

The increasing feedback between the universities and the business sector could provoke a greater correspondence between studies and labour market requirements. Some examples could be to establish improvements in the practices of the students in the companies and give more information to the students about the business sector during their studies.

3.3 The Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) – The Netherlands

NVAO has approached various stakeholders: academic staff, evaluation agencies, the Ministry of Education, the Dutch Inspectorate of Education, students, employers' organisations and employees' organisations. These stakeholders were selected according to the stocktaking document, which reflects the current involvement of stakeholders in The Netherlands. In general, all stakeholders find themselves quite involved in the quality assurance of higher education. The Employers' organisations are an exception: they indicate their involvement is small. Meanwhile, most stakeholders wish to be more involved and have suggested to NVAO some ideas for how they can be more involved in the accreditation process.

The results of the survey point out that the changes in the Dutch accreditation system have a positive effect on stakeholders' involvement. Since 1 January 2011, a new accreditation system based on institutional audit combined with (initial) programme accreditation was introduced in the Netherlands. The new system contains a recovery period. For these assessment changes, NVAO needed to develop new frameworks. Stakeholders were seen as important participants of these developments:

... the new frameworks for accreditation and institutional audit in use in the Netherlands were designed in consultation with representatives of institutions, quality assurance agencies and other assessment experts. Moreover, the new frameworks used in the Netherlands were designed with reference to a thorough evaluation of the previous system, followed by various forms of discussions with external stakeholders... (ENquality assurance, Report of the external review of NVAO. September 2012).

The following text will show that several stakeholders share this opinion.

Academic staff

Staff members are a key factor in the quality of education. They claim to be able to transform quality assurance policy into actual measures. For example, they design up-to-date education methodology and curricula and contribute to the development of a quality culture.

Academic staff find that NVAO could take on the role of an advisory body in addition to that of quality assessor. Furthermore, they find “NVAO should prevent an overkill of rules and should spend more time on the actual education. In this way they will prevent teachers being only concerned with rules and procedures instead of doing their main job - teaching.” (Results survey NVAO, 2013)

The results of the survey show that NVAO could often have meetings with staff members in order to increase their knowledge about higher education and vice versa: HEIs should feel free to ask NVAO questions.

The early experiences of the changes in the Dutch accreditation system indicate that teaching staff feel more involved in the accreditation process than under the old system. The ENQA review explains that HEIs were involved in pilot-testing the new accreditation frameworks, a practice which is seen as a valid way of establishing new frameworks and procedures. However, these results are contrary to the Research Net Teachers Survey (2013), which shows that not all academic staff members find that their involvement has improved as a result of the changes to the accreditation system. Further research is needed to clarify these outcomes.

Evaluation agencies

In the Dutch accreditation system, evaluations are performed by evaluation agencies. They support the expert panels, in accordance with NVAO frameworks, standards, and guidelines. These agencies can be contracted by HEIs.

Evaluation agencies indicate that their involvement in quality assurance is large and contained in the actual evaluation process. This process consists of several elements, such as composing review panels, organising site visits, and interpreting NVAO Frameworks. Because they have significant expertise in this area, they wish to be more involved. Follow-up interviews should clarify the exact extent of this involvement.

Evaluation agencies indicate that the number of meetings between stakeholders and NVAO has increased, and as a result, their involvement has increased as well. For example, NVAO provides detailed manuals for the evaluation of the reports and organises trainings for secretaries. These matters are confirmed by ENQA: both ENQA and the evaluation agencies are satisfied with the amount of contact hours between the agencies and NVAO. However, they do not have a clear picture of the way in which NVAO deals with stakeholders' suggestions concerning the improvement of quality assurance. In this regard NVAO should provide a channel where stakeholders could make suggestions.

The Ministry of Education

The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science claims to be quite involved with the quality assurance of higher education. It operates in legal, political, and practical contexts, with the ministry responsible for advising the Minister, sharing a vision of quality assurance and the legalisation in this regard. They indicate their involvement as large. In contrast with other stakeholders, the Ministry is not particularly in favor of increasing its involvement, as it is deemed to be sufficient.

The Dutch Inspectorate of Education

The Inspectorate of education is involved in the quality assurance of higher education by enforcing laws and regulations and by dealing with specific key issues (such as alternative graduation paths, shortened routes for examinations, etc.). The Inspectorate also functions as a contact person whenever a serious incident occurs. The Inspectorate wishes to be more involved in the quality assurance of higher education, for instance, monitoring the accreditation system on a more structured level to better identify weaknesses and strengths.

Students

The involvement of students is neither large nor small. They indicate their involvement as ‘medium’, where they are seen to represent the “customers” of higher education – which is a large and important group. In general, students are satisfied about their current involvement, but recognise that institutions and NVAO should pay more attention to local involvement: the “ordinary” student should be more involved. This could be achieved by conducting random checks and interviews with students instead of sending the standard evaluation forms at the end of a semester. This could help to achieve a better understanding of particular teachers or curriculum.

NVAO shares this criticism. The stocktaking document states that although students are involved in quality assurance in many ways, it is a question of whether the students involved are a sufficient representation of the student community at large. The ENQA review concludes that the large involvement of students is a very positive aspect, however, NVAO wishes to further increase their role, for example, by improving the readability of assessments reports. Interestingly, students do not view their role as very large, nor do they see the need to increase it. Furthermore, they do not criticise the readability of the assessment reports.

Employers’ organisations

Employers’ organisations claim that their involvement can be described as “the bridge between higher education and the professional field”. They have insight as to what is needed in the labour market and can use this to help improve programmes. They were unanimous when asked whether they would like to be more involved in the quality assurance of higher education: yes. They prefer more clear agreements between employers and higher education. They wish for a more structured framework in which both parties are able to make specific agreements concerning relations between higher education and the professional field.

Employers’ organisations wish to have a larger role in the accreditation processes. They want ongoing and regular meetings with institutions and NVAO in order to keep education connected to the working field. In this way they wish to prevent institutions from becoming too aloof.

NVAO shares these suggestions. The stocktaking document says that there is quite a lot of room for improvement. NVAO has recently initiated contacts with umbrella organisations to achieve more involvement, however, a question remains as to how this should be established.

Employees’ organisations

The employees’ organisations involved in this study indicate the extent of their involvement in the quality assurance of higher education is medium. They are involved in both the quality assurance of professions and the related financial matters. On a more practical level, they are responsible for the introduction of the basic teaching qualification (*bko*) for teachers in Dutch higher education. Overall, employees’ organisations see no use in becoming more involved in the quality assurance of higher education. They claim to be quite involved already and find their role and impact sufficient.

3.4 Swiss Center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (OAQ) – Switzerland

Students

In Switzerland, students are recruited, trained, and placed for external quality assurance procedures. In the near future, students will be prepared and trained for the coming cycle of quality audits of all Swiss universities. Students are involved in a national working group that is assigned to define new practices for accreditation and quality assurance relating to the new Federal Law on Encouragement and Coordination in the Higher Education Sector (HFKG). One student is a member of the OAQ-Advisory Board.

Students describe the benefit of their involvement as “highly valuable for student participation”. They offer their views and concerns regarding higher education and quality assurance in Switzerland and consider themselves to be treated as full partners.

When asked how they think their involvement could be improved, they answered that the instruments for quality assurance should be distributed more widely, the communication of processes and outcomes could be better and in this way contribute to a deeper understanding of transparency of quality assurance. Students could also be better involved in the internal quality assurance processes of universities.

To sum up, student involvement in quality assurance is already developed and quite deep. In their eyes, quality assurance mechanisms should be more transparent, for example, through more easily understandable processes that are communicated in a better, less bureaucratic way with common sense and in a common language.

Institutions

The representatives of institutions (both universities and universities of applied sciences) comprise the majority of expert panels. Moreover, there is a quality network composed of staff from universities that meets regularly to discuss topics regarding quality assurance. Finally, active professors are included in the OAQ Scientific Advisory Board.

Swiss HEIs are involved in both internal and external quality assurance. Overall, they indicate their involvement is sufficient. Some fear that an increase of their involvement may lead to more (undesirable) bureaucracy. However, they appreciate quality assurance and that it serves as a proof of trustworthiness to the outside world. Moreover, they find quality assurance useful and consider that it has positive effects on their institutions. For example, a benefit of quality assurance is the evaluation-based development of teaching, and that institutions gain more knowledge about further career developments of alumni.

As for the future of their involvement, institutions stress the importance of transparency and information exchange, aspects which could be improved. Some suggest OAQ could exchange quality developments with faculties on a regular basis or to introduce systems to assure information exchange.

3.5 The Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES) – Portugal

In the Portuguese case, the questionnaire was conducted during February 2013 and addressed ten stakeholders, distributed as follows:

- three representatives from HEIs: one from the Portuguese Universities Council of Rectors (CRUP); one from the Polytechnic Institutions Coordinating Council (CCISP); and one from the Portuguese Association of Private Higher Education (APESP);
- two students’ representatives: one representing university students and the other polytechnic students;
- one representative of the National Federation of Teachers (FENPROF);
- one representative from each of the four professional associations (PAs): engineers, pharmacists, architects, and economists.

The three representatives from HEIs (CRUP, CCISP and APESP) argued that they or their institutions have been involved in quality assurance, either now or in the past. The universities and polytechnics representatives (CRUP and CCISP) stated that this involvement has been both at the level of internal

and external quality assurance, while the representative of private HEIs (APESP) argued that it occurred only at the level of external quality assurance.

The three representatives from HEIs reported different types of involvement in the quality assurance of higher education. The universities' representative has been involved both as an academic/member of the staff of an HEI and as a member of a statutory or regulatory body (e.g., CRUP); the polytechnics' representative (CCISP) has been involved as an academic/member of the staff of an HEI; and the representative of private HEIs as a member of a statutory or regulatory body (e.g., APESP). Therefore, only the CCISP representative reports his involvement not as a member of a regulatory body but in individual terms.

As for the students' representatives, the one representing university students has been involved in higher education quality assurance both as a student of an HEI and as a member of an organisation representing (university) students. The student representing polytechnic students has been involved only as a member of an organisation representing (polytechnic) students.

The FENPROF representative's involvement occurred while leader and president of the national council of this union and as a leader of another teachers' trade union.

Finally, two of the PA representatives (engineers and pharmacists) have been involved in the quality assurance of higher education only as members of these associations, while the other two (architects and economists), were also involved as academics/members of the staff in an HEI and, specifically in one case (economists PA representative), as a member of CRUP.

Regarding the extent of involvement in the quality assurance of higher education, the representatives of HEIs report different degrees of involvement. The universities' representative identifies different levels in his involvement: as an academic, as a manager at an HEI, and as a member of CRUP. As an academic he has been involved in the quality assurance of the study cycles where he teaches, of the research units where he is a researcher, and of the assessment of the academic and non-academic staff of his school/faculty/department. As a manager of an HEI he has had strong involvement both in the regulation and implementation of quality assurance procedures. Finally, as a member of CRUP representing this organisation in the A3ES Advisory Council, he has been following the agency's development of the quality assurance process.

The polytechnics' representative reports his involvement in the quality assurance of higher education as the president of an HEI responsible for starting the implementation of an internal quality assurance system which has been accredited by A3ES.

Finally, according to the private institutions' representative, APESP's involvement in quality assurance has included the reception, systematisation, and dissemination (to the organisation members) of information and documents concerning quality assurance, issued by A3ES or other sources. Documents produced by APESP particularly emphasise the need for HEIs to draft internal quality assurance manuals and to establish offices for quality assurance management acting as A3ES partners.

In the case of the students' representatives, only the one representing polytechnic students characterised (although in a very synthetic way) the extent of his involvement in the quality assurance of higher education. As the president of a student federation (the National Federation of Polytechnic Student Unions) this representative argued that he had a special interest in the Portuguese quality assurance system. Furthermore, as the representative of polytechnic students in the A3ES Advisory Council, he had the opportunity to discuss several issues related to the agency's

actions. The university students' representative only mentioned his involvement in quality assurance as a representative of university students in the Advisory Council of A3ES.

According to the FENPROF representative, this trade union has been playing an active role in promoting public and private HEIs' quality assurance. This is evidenced by the FENPROF's:

- Intervention whenever it receives academics' complaints about aspects affecting negatively upon teaching and research quality;
- Talking to the successive governments so the necessary measures are taken to assure quality, namely regarding the improvement of academics' working conditions, training and qualifications, time for research, and third mission activities;
- Efforts to ensure academics' professional autonomy or academic freedom, which is considered fundamental to the quality of higher education. One example of such efforts is the attempt to establish an instrument for the regulation of academic careers in private HEIs. The absence of this regulation, continuously neglected by governments and institutions, has been contributing to significant quality problems within the sector (for instance, the lack of permanent and adequately qualified academic staff).

The representatives of the PAs also referred to different extents of involvement in the quality assurance of higher education. In two cases (engineers and pharmacists PAs) it is stated that this involvement comprised participation in the A3ES Advisory Council, through the drafting of reports and issuing of opinions on the assessment of study programmes (engineers' association) or the creation of new study programmes (pharmacists' association). As member of a university academic staff, the representative from another PA (architects) participated in the self-assessment process of study programmes, while, as a member of this association, he was involved as both the president of the national admissions board and as a representative of the professional association in the A3ES Advisory Council. Finally, the representative of a fourth PA (economists) participated in the analysis of study programmes giving access to the profession.

In relation to the advantages deriving from stakeholders' involvement, the three representatives of HEIs describe differently the benefits of their or their organisation's involvement with improving the quality assurance of higher education. Several positive aspects identified by the universities' representative, a member of different organisations assuming different roles in quality assurance, are: the regulation of quality assurance procedures; the promotion of the involvement of different actors; the development of different monitoring tools and analysis models; the implementation of improvement actions; the development of self-assessment; and the participation in external assessment. In turn, the benefits identified by the polytechnics' representative resulting from his involvement in quality assurance relate specifically to the global improvement of the HEI to which he belongs. This improvement comprises aspects such as the organisational model, teaching/learning processes, research, insertion in the community and services to society, internationalisation, or social accountability. More specifically, this improvement was reflected in the increased concern of institutional actors (students, academic, and non-academic staff), in general, with continuous quality improvement. Finally, the private HEIs' representative identified the greatest benefit from his/his organisation's involvement in quality assurance as the development of a quality culture. This culture is seen as fundamental for helping HEIs' members of APESP to achieve quality standards consistent with the activities they develop.

Students' representatives also report different benefits to the quality of higher education deriving from their involvement in quality assurance. The university students' representative sees his involvement as extremely important since it reflects university students' positions in the A3ES Advisory Council, the only agency body where students' intervention is foreseen. The decisions taken by this Council are usually discussed and voted on during the student union's national

meeting. Although indirect, this constitutes a privileged way for students to participate and contribute to the process of improving the quality of Portuguese higher education. On the other hand, the polytechnic students' representative argued that, since his main role is only to follow and support the work and decisions of the bodies responsible for quality assurance (for instance, A3ES), the benefit may be the possible alignment of these decisions with the polytechnic students' interests.

For the FENPROF representative the benefit of the trade union's involvement has been help with overcoming quality problems. A more specific benefit is constituted by the recent revision of the university and polytechnic academics' careers. As a result, there was an increase of the qualifications required to enter the polytechnic career and a reduction of the number of polytechnic academics with term contracts. This has contributed to the consolidation of the polytechnics' academic staff.

Finally, the representatives of PAs also identify different benefits deriving from their/their associations' involvement in quality assurance. In the case of the engineers' association, the main benefit was to contribute (or continue to contribute) to improving the quality of engineering training, in close collaboration with A3ES. For the representative of the pharmacists' association, the involvement of this and other PAs has had the positive effect of promoting a better articulation between the training offered by HEIs and the professions' "real needs". The representative of the architects' association identifies benefits deriving from different forms of involvement. For instance, his involvement as a member of the academic staff of a university participating in the self-assessment of study programmes enabled the analysis of several issues, having as reference the A3ES framework. In turn, the association's participation in the A3ES Advisory Council is a factor contributing to increased trust from HEIs and collaboration, not only with the professional association, but also towards the quality assurance procedures. Finally, the representative of the economists' association does not identify a benefit resulting directly from its involvement but rather from the A3ES action. According to him, the need for the study programmes (namely those giving access to the profession or to additional training/internships) to be accredited by A3ES constitutes a sign (evidence) and an incentive to achieve quality.

Regarding the possibility of increasing stakeholder involvement, with the exception of the CRUP representative, who contends that involvement is already "sufficiently high", all the remaining respondents stated they would like to be more involved in the quality assurance of higher education.

Referring to his experience in quality assurance as a member of the academic staff and, more specifically, of the management of an HEI responsible for the implementation of its internal quality assurance system, the CCISP representative argues that involvement at this level could be improved if efforts were made to simplify the system by increasing its accessibility and awareness (by institutional actors) and decreasing its bureaucratic character. In turn, the APESP representative suggests that in order to improve HEIs' involvement and engagement in quality assurance, institutional leaders and managers should receive specific training on quality assurance issues. This would also allow for more effective cooperation between HEIs and A3ES.

According to the university students' representative, student involvement in quality assurance could be improved if they were permitted to participate at the level of other bodies of the A3ES (besides the Advisory Council). In turn, for the polytechnic students' representative this involvement could be improved by changing students' participation in the external assessment teams from experimental (as currently verified) to effective by increasing the number of students in the bodies holding the power of decision on quality assurance issues.

The FENPROF representative considers that greater involvement could contribute to the dissemination of a quality culture among the trade union members and to a better monitoring of academics' recruitment and working conditions and thereby ensure the quality of academics.

Finally, representatives of the PAs identify different reasons for greater involvement in quality assurance or ways how this could be achieved. Although perceiving as positive the collaboration existing between A3ES and the engineers' association, its representative would like to see this organisation have a more active role in the quality assessment of engineering study programmes. The same opinion is shared by the representatives of both the pharmacists' and architects' PAs. For the former, a more direct intervention of the PAs, in general, in the accreditation of the study programmes constituting the basic training for access to some professions (as already occurred in the past with some study programmes, such as engineering and pharmacy) would be positive. For the representative of the architects' association, a more active participation of PAs in the assessment and accreditation of study programmes promoted by A3ES would contribute to strengthening the links between universities and professionals, improving training and, thus, graduates' quality. Furthermore, it would specifically allow the architects' association to closely verify architecture study programmes' compliance with the legal requirements for architecture training. Finally, besides a more active role in assessment and accreditation, the architects' association's involvement could also provide advice on the opinions produced by the EATs, before the drafting of the final external reports. The representative of the economists' association did not objectively address the issue of increasing stakeholder involvement. Rather, he expressed a global opinion on the pertinence of study programmes' accreditation. He argued that the existence of criteria for study programmes' quality is essential and that only economics study programmes meeting these criteria and, thus, accredited by A3ES, are recognised by the professional association.

Finally, respondents were also asked to give suggestions or recommendations regarding stakeholder involvement in quality assurance. Among HEIs' representatives, only the one from CRUP made no suggestions or further comments. Referring again to his experience as a member of the academic staff and management of a specific HEI, the CCISP representative argued that the implementation of the internal quality assurance system constituted one of the most difficult, but also most successful, steps taken by the institution in recent years. However, this implementation is not complete; it is a "work in progress". Unlike the previous respondent, the APESP representative discussed quality assurance in a more broad way. In his opinion it would be important to ensure greater flexibility of the quality assurance model followed by A3ES, so institutional and statutory diversity of the HEIs (members of the APESP) could be preserved. This would allow the existence of various quality assurance models, complementary to the single model currently existing. Neither of the two students' representatives proposed further comments or suggestions.

In the FENPROF representative's opinion, quality assurance systems should be more inclusive (extensive) and demanding in regard to the requirements that must be met by both private and public academic staff. These systems should be concerned not only with academics' qualifications but especially with HEIs having their own academic staff, with stable and indefinite working contracts and benefiting from academic freedom. Only if these conditions are met, academics will be able to criticise HEIs' practices endangering quality and, therefore, contribute to quality improvement.

Finally, only two of the four representatives of the PAs, namely the engineers' and the architects' associations, made additional comments. According to the former, the engineers' association perceives as extremely important the current system for study programme accreditation, which constitutes a regulation mechanism essential to promote quality assurance. Therefore, the professional association is willing to maintain its collaboration with A3ES, thereby contributing to the

quality assurance of engineering training. The representative of the architects' association suggested that its participation in the assessment and accreditation processes should be better defined by A3ES, as a way to promote the improvement of architecture training.

Conclusion

In general, the Portuguese stakeholders targeted by the WG4 questionnaire tended to express positive perceptions concerning their involvement with quality assurance, independently of its type and extension, and on the benefits deriving from it. Nonetheless, stakeholders also stressed the need for increasing or improving this involvement. According to stakeholders representing HEIs this improvement could be achieved by reinforcing the training of institutional leaders and managers on quality assurance issues as well as a more effective cooperation between HEIs and A3ES. For student representatives their involvement in quality assurance could be improved if students could participate in A3ES bodies besides the Advisory Council, thus having a more active role in quality assurance decision-making processes, and if their presence in the EATs, instead of being experimental, could be effective. Finally, the representatives of the trade union and professional associations argue that a stronger involvement of these organisations in the quality assurance process could be achieved through a more active role in both the monitoring of academic staff qualifications and working conditions and the assessment and accreditation of study programmes. At this level, stakeholders would like to have the opportunity to analyse study programmes' compliance with legal requirements for training in specific areas of knowledge and to issue opinions on the external assessment reports prior to their final versions. These findings seem to suggest the need to revise or, at least, rethink Portuguese stakeholders' involvement with quality assurance, so it could be better aligned with their expectations and needs. While keeping always as primary concern to preserve the independence and objectivity of quality assurance (system and processes), A3ES could take this opportunity to promote and lead that revision.

3.6 The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) – Lithuania

Ministry of Education and Science

Extent of involvement in quality assurance practices

The primary responsibility of educational quality in Lithuania falls on the Ministry of Education and Science. The Law on Higher Education and Research states that the Ministry of Education and Science is an institution implementing policy of research and higher education, therefore its involvement in quality assurance is of a wide range and mostly related to the development of higher education legislation. The Ministry has its representative in the Board of SKVC – the Lithuanian quality assurance agency.

Benefits of involvement in quality assurance practices

One of the aims of the Ministry is to enhance quality of higher education. Being involved in quality assurance processes, the Ministry knows the main areas that need improvement and support (nowadays attention is mainly paid to the content of curriculum (shift to learning outcomes approach), investments for the renewal of HEI infrastructure, development of teaching staff qualification, implementation of internal quality management systems at HEIs, etc.). It helps the Ministry to take appropriate actions in order to increase accessibility and attractiveness of higher education and to correspond to the needs of economy.

Improvement of involvement in quality assurance practices being seen

The Ministry does not see any specific measures for how its involvement in quality assurance practices can be improved, but expresses a desire for the curriculum to correspond to the economy, labour market, and students' needs and to improve the practical training of students, international collaboration, effectiveness of the higher education system. For this purpose the ministry

encourages permanent monitoring, analysis of data, and proposals on how to improve the situation in higher education.

Students

Extent of involvement in quality assurance practices

The Lithuanian Students' Union feels sufficiently involved in quality assurance processes. The students' union takes part in internal quality assurance processes through its members (i.e. student representative organisations) in each HEI (senate, academic council, study programme committees, surveys on teaching quality, etc.). Its members are also directly involved (delegation of representatives) in the activities of SKVC and various other institutions related to higher education (boards, councils, working groups, etc.). The students' union also contributes to quality assurance by submitting proposals regarding quality assurance processes.

Benefits of involvement in quality assurance practices

Involvement in quality assurance processes is essential for the Lithuanian Students' Union which represents students at the national level. The benefit for the students' union is their ability to submit proposals on various higher education issues. Through such involvement, the students' union gathers experience and skills which are needed in everyday activities. It also helps to strengthen member's activities (e.g. trainings for student representatives' organisations, dissemination of good practices, etc.).

Improvement of involvement in quality assurance practices being seen

The Lithuanian Student's Union is content with its involvement in quality assurance processes and wishes to be involved on at least the same level in the future, although SKVC sees that improvement should be made at least at institutional level, because during study programme evaluations it observes that results of various student surveys in HEIs are not taken seriously or that students' opinions have no impact on decisions. Students sometimes do not receive feedback on what were the results and how they were used.

Employers

Extent of involvement in quality assurance practices

One of the employers' organisations – the Engineering Industries Association of Lithuania (LINPRA) – is involved in SKVC's Study Programme Evaluation Committee (which considers and approves evaluation reports written by teams of experts). LINPRA also nominates candidate experts for evaluation of study programmes and institutional review.

Benefits of involvement in quality assurance practices

The association thinks that involvement of its members in quality assurance processes in higher education brings benefit to the association and its members because enhancement of training of professionals at all educational levels is one of its main priorities. The association is critical about the quality of training of professionals in the majority of engineering study fields, therefore it seeks to contribute to the improvement of the situation.

Improvement of involvement in quality assurance practices being seen

The association sees a necessity to renew the national regulations of technological sciences, strengthening the development of modern products and mastering the technological basis of effective production during studies. The association thinks that the quality of higher education could be improved if HEIs could collaborate more actively with the industry by implementing their applied research, etc. at the local and international level. Periodic internships for teaching staff and practical placement of students at innovative enterprises could be very effective.

The association could help universities to organise joint postgraduate (doctoral) studies involving foreign universities and enterprises, a good way to substantially renew the composition and qualifications of teaching staff. Using the association's partners from other EU countries can help to find and transfer experiences necessary for Lithuania.

3.7 The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) – United Kingdom

QAA conducted the survey by telephone with a select group of stakeholders. Nine interviews took place between January and March 2013 with representatives of: university mission groups million+, 1994 Group¹, and the Russell Group, the National Union of Students, and an employer organisation. Three other planned interviews did not take place.

The survey findings reflect the fact that all higher education providers with the power to award their own degrees in the United Kingdom (UK) must take part in external quality assurance with QAA - a requirement of the government. It is also a requirement of the funding councils for higher education that providers of higher education that are in receipt of public funds must be reviewed by QAA.

To capture the wider views of institutions, representatives of the university mission groups were approached to speak on behalf of the universities. Around half of the UK's universities are a member of a "mission group" - self-selected membership organisations of universities with a similar approach and ethos. All mission group representatives reiterated the autonomous institutions' responsibility for assuring their own management of standards and quality enhancement, affirming that they take their responsibilities seriously. The Russell Group highlighted institutional autonomy, while million+ describe the system of quality assurance as "about right".

The National Union of Students (NUS) highlights the importance of student engagement in quality assurance processes, including external reviews by QAA. NUS in particular highlighted the many ways in which the organisation works with QAA to strengthen student engagement in quality assurance processes.

The employer organisation acknowledged concerns from employers about the employability skills of graduates and, in particular, perceived differences in standards between institutions or even courses. The employer organisations noted employer involvement in subject benchmark statements - published by QAA and setting out expectations about standards of degrees in a range of subject areas - and stated that it would "welcome an exploration of more direct involvement to complement activity with employers that exists already".

3.8 The Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria) – Austria

The act on external quality assurance in higher education (HS-QSG) stipulates involvement of various groups (e.g. scientific community, students, and the group of professionals/employers) in various ways, e.g. in the composition of the bodies of AQ Austria. In addition, all stakeholders (except for the ministry) are involved in the development of external quality assurance procedures and some of them participate in quality assurance procedures (eg. students as members of review teams).

Whereas official stakeholder groups (e.g. Universities Austria, Association of Universities of Applied Sciences) are involved both in internal and external quality assurance, students (Austrian National Union of Students), social partners, and the responsible ministry are currently only involved in external quality assurance processes.

¹ Since the surveys took place, the member universities of the 1994 Group agreed to disband. At the time of writing, the universities formerly of this group remain unaffiliated.

The extent of involvement comprises mainly representation in the bodies and committees of the former three QA agencies and AQ Austria respectively, provision of feedback to the new act on external quality assurance in higher education, participation in the development of external quality assurance procedures, and representation in quality assurance committees of stakeholder groups.

From the stakeholder point of view, stakeholder involvement supports the optimisation of the procedures in place and promotes the understanding of quality assurance procedures and the exchange of opinions amongst the stakeholders. While the extent of involvement seems to be adequate for the official stakeholder groups and the responsible ministry, social partners would prefer a stronger involvement in decision-making structures. The students' union favours a closer cooperation with AQ Austria regarding the student expert pool.

3.9 The National Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation (ANECA) – Spain

ANECA accomplished a combined set of telephone and face-to-face interviews depending on the agenda and availability of the stakeholders. The interviews included representatives of the Spanish Rectors' Conference, the national student union, and the Secretary General of the social councils of Spanish Public Universities, where the representatives of society are represented inside the public HEIs.

In the version of its Strategic plan 2013-2016, ANECA included a particular emphasis on its relations with society as a whole, represented by various stakeholders that have an active representation in the agency's boards and committees as well as in the evaluation teams.

Derived from the strategic objectives dealing with this purpose, the Unit for Institutional and International Relations and Communication prepared a document called "Action Plan with the stakeholders of the Spanish Higher Education system". This document identifies each stakeholder and clarifies how a relationship with the stakeholders and ANECA could be carried out in order that it is meaningful for the purpose of the agency's activities and to the benefit of the stakeholder.

The stakeholders that should be approached according to the strategic plan and this document are: individual higher institutions, the Spanish Rectors' Conference, students, academic staff and associations, and trade unions, employers, and socioeconomic representatives. Other ministries and offices of the national government as well as regional governments and agencies are also included, although they were not subject to the survey which focused only on the main list of stakeholders identified within the European Higher Education Area after the Bucharest Ministerial Meeting.

The interviews were open, although effort was made to follow the questions and topics of the survey. From the responses gathered, some conclusions could be drawn.

Students

The representative of the national students' union was satisfied about the level of involvement achieved within ANECA in terms of having representation in both the Board of Trustees and the Advisory Board as well as taking part regularly in the evaluation panels for programme accreditation. Some of the weaknesses identified was the lack of participation of students in the design of new evaluation procedures and the difficulties related to the profile of "student" according to the new panorama of part-time, on-line and lifelong learning students.

Individual HEIs

Aside from ANECA's relationship with the Rectors' Conference, it is important to maintain the bilateral link with the institutions involved in evaluation processes. The interviews showed that this relationship, which exists mostly at the vice-rector level, is strong and steady although it is in need of

some improvement; for example, it could be helpful to establish a formal procedure to promote and motivate different departments within the HEIs to collaborate with the agency's initiatives.

Rectors' Conference

The interview showed that there is a strong and steady relationship with the President and the different subcommittees in this organisation as well as with her Secretary General. The most important weakness identified was that the institutionalised relationship is made essentially through the Board of Trustees. A much less formal channel of communication should be set up for future interactions, particularly concerning the internationalisation of the Spanish HEIs and cooperation in international projects.

Employers

Responses were not received from the national employers' associations, highlighting a main area for improvement. The only existing contact with this sector is through the social councils of public universities which usually are chaired by a representative of the employer's sector. Therefore, the contact is indirect and only related to public HEIs.

Academic staff associations and trade unions

This has been another group whose engagement could be improved. The interviews could not be carried out. Academic staff are strongly involved in various ways and procedures with ANECA beyond the particular evaluation panels and teams, but this involvement has not been widely achieved, and it is still felt in some contexts that only the "true believers" collaborate with the agency.

3.10 Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) – Kosovo

Based on the Kosovar survey, the most involved stakeholders have proven to be HEIs and their academic staff. Academic staff stated that most are involved in both internal and external quality assurance processes; however, they would like to participate more actively in the future. Students represented in the student's organisation and other students stated that they are not very satisfied with the level of their involvement in quality assurance processes, particularly at their own university, and they think that they should be more involved and play a more important role in quality assurance processes. Regarding the involvement of the government in quality assurance processes, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology answered the survey and stated that it is involved in internal and external quality assurance processes by providing the legal basis for the work of HEIs and KAA.

As far as the employers' involvement is concerned, their involvement is still very symbolic and not sufficient. They are involved in only a few universities as members of the governing boards or members of faculty boards. According to KAA, there is not yet a culture for cooperation established between universities and the business sector that will contribute to identifying the needs of the economy and increase employment of university graduates. As a summary of the survey, KAA concluded that there is an urgent need to find a strategy for better involvement of all stakeholders in quality assurance processes in higher education in Kosovo, particularly of the business sector.

3.11 The Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance and Career Development (AKKORK) – Russia

In Russia, several stakeholders were approached for this study. The questionnaires were sent by email to HEIs, an employer organisation and a students' organisation. In the Russian Federation there are three types of HEIs: institutes, academies, and universities. There are 634 state HEIs and 446 private HEIs in Russia. The questionnaires were sent to about 100 HEIs, both state and private. One of the biggest employers' organisations is OPORA ROSSII, an association of small- and medium-

sized enterprises. AKKORK actively collaborates with OPORA ROSSII and also with the Association of Restaurateurs and Hoteliers, which was one of the first to develop their own professional standards. AKKORK also collaborates with the All-Russia Students Union.

Higher Education Institutions

Most universities in Russia are aware of the quality assurance procedures in Russia and 35 percent of them are taking part in those procedures. About 20 percent are aware of the quality assurance procedures but do not take part in them.

Universities in Russia participate in both internal and external quality assurance. Those HEIs which are not involved in only one form are involved in internal (16 %) or external (13%) quality assurance. Organisations that are not involved in quality assurance at all account for 56 percent of the respondents.

Other stakeholders

Practically all the respondents wish to be more involved in the quality assurance in higher education (69%), whereas those who do not want to be more involved constitute 16 percent. Stakeholders mostly wish to be more involved in review processes - not only to be under review, but to be reviewer. All the stakeholders suggested to

- continue with quality assurance processes in HEIs;
- develop more in-depth standards for evaluation, taking into account regional specifics;
- make such surveys from time to time;
- conduct seminars that aim at promoting the usage of the ESG and tell more on how to align the work of HEIs to them;
- organise events that will promote quality assurance in higher education at the country level and to foster interaction between stakeholders; and
- update the evaluation methodology

Chapter IV. Good practices for improvement and focal points to contribute to the agenda of ENQA

When comparing stakeholder involvement in several European countries, there seems to be both differences and similarities. To gain more insight in successful activities and policies at a national level, it is relevant to find which methods of involvement are designated as good practices. Doing so makes it possible to compare certain policies and practices regarding involvement between the various participating countries and organisations in this study, resulting in a situation in which colleagues may learn from each other. Also, the identified good practices may be used as focal points for following debates regarding the Bologna Follow-Up Group.

The designation of good practices happened on the basis of a mutual review. Representatives of participating agencies selected good practices of stakeholder involvement from the other agencies. In this way, a fair overview could be made. The report below shows the good practices organised by stakeholder.

4.1 Higher education institutions

One of the most important groups of stakeholders are the providers of higher education: the institutions. They are primarily responsible for higher education and its quality, quality enhancement, and quality assurance.

In the United Kingdom, all publicly funded universities and colleges are reviewed every four to six years. All these institutions subscribe to QAA and pay an annual fee. These subscriptions enable QAA to fulfill its role in protecting the reputation of UK higher education. Representatives of these

colleges join a Quality Strategy Network in which they discuss quality issues. Private higher education also contains a substantial and important area of QAA's work. The British government has announced that private providers in England wishing to recruit students who will be drawing on public finance in the form of student loans will need to be reviewed by QAA. Moreover, the public education sector is represented in the Board of QAA.

In the Netherlands, all programmes are assessed every six years. During an accreditation procedure, a lot of communication between NVAO and the relevant university takes place. At a broader level, NVAO often has contact with the umbrella organisations of both private and funded institutions, which have regular meetings with NVAO. Finally, and similar to the United Kingdom, HEIs are represented in NVAO's Advisory Board.

ACSUG, the quality assurance agency in Galicia, involves institutions in quality assurance because they are represented in the Board of Directors. At a more practical level, their participation in the evaluation activities of ACSUG has contributed to the design and the implementation of quality improvement processes in Galician universities. For instance, quality improvements have been made in teaching staff, the following up of degrees, and in internal quality assurance systems.

4.2 Teaching staff

When looking at the providers of higher education, teaching staff is a key factor in the quality of education. Results of the survey show that teaching staff is involved but merely on an individual basis (expert panel members) and in a rather indirect way. Compared to HEIs, there is more distance between the quality of higher education and teaching staff. Often they are represented in umbrella organisations, conferences, or labour unions. However, teaching, and thus teaching staff, seems to have a direct relation to educational quality.

In Germany the academic staff is represented in both internal and external quality assurance. They are involved in internal and external evaluation, particularly in accreditation procedures. Accreditation procedures are seen as an appropriate instrument of monitoring whether the level of teaching and learning is being maintained. With regard to this monitoring, surveys are seen as an appropriate instrument for receiving feedback from students (internal feedback) and employers (external feedback). From the feedback, institutions can learn whether the aims of their programmes can be assured and if external requirements are implemented.

In Lithuania, the involvement of teaching staff is quite extensive. At SKVC, the accreditation organisation of Lithuania, teaching staff is mainly involved in expert teams, within which they comprise the majority. In both internal and external quality assurance procedures, different HEIs are represented.

4.3 Students

In Portugal, at the level of internal assessment, students are expected to: be integrated in self-assessment exercises, specifically through their compulsory involvement in pedagogic councils and student unions; participate in anonymous questionnaires on teaching staff and courses, which form a compulsory part of the self-evaluation process; and to be present at the meetings with the EATs during their visits to HEIs (and study programmes) in the context of the external assessment exercises. Moreover, students are also involved in external quality assurance. Portugal's legal framework, however, makes no reference to the roles students should have while participating in self-assessment exercises.

In The Netherlands, student involvement in quality assurance in higher education is high, too. Results of the survey show that students are quite satisfied about the many ways in which NVAO

involves them in quality assurance. For example, expert panels must have one student member, NVAO has regular meetings with students' umbrella organisations (both formal and informal), students are represented in NVAO's Advisory Board, they are consulted in the appointment procedure of NVAO Board members, and their perspective is represented in NVAO's General Board. NVAO also involves students in its development activities, such as new accreditation frameworks or strategic plans.

EKKA considers Estonian students as partners in their development activities. They are involved in the process of developing procedures for external evaluations and play a role in every assessment committee. Estonia's student involvement even goes back to secondary education. While developing the terms and procedures for institutional accreditation, students of upper secondary schools have been surveyed about their expectations for the quality of HEIs and quality assessment.

A third example of direct involvement of students is the United Kingdom. QAA has a student engagement strategy, which includes, among others, involvement in training events, workshops, and roundtable discussions. Also, students are given the opportunity to meet influential leaders.

4.4 The labour market

Employers of graduates, the "demanding side" of education, is involved in the quality assurance in another way than the other stakeholders. It might seem that the professional field is not a direct part of higher education, but results of the survey show the opposite. All organisations of the participating countries in this study agree that the working field has important insight in what is needed in the labour market. It is aware of the specific demands of employers and corresponding diploma requirements. Results show that the professional field (employers' organisations, for instance) wishes to increase and improve its involvement.

In the UK, the working field is quite involved in the quality assurance of higher education. For example, QAA involves employers' representatives in the revision and development of subject benchmark statements, they are consulted and advised about developments in the quality assurance of work-based learning and employer engagement in higher education, and they are asked to comment on such developments. Also, the UK Quality Code includes a range of references to promote higher education providers' engagement and collaboration with employers. Finally, QAA helps guide employers to understand the qualifications and skills of today's students and the frameworks within which they sit.

Although it seems that some agencies have found ways of involving the working field in quality assurance, overall it still needs improvement. Because the extent of this particular subject is quite large, Appendix III provides an overview of current ways in which QA agencies across Europe involve the labour market.

4.5 Stakeholders in the Board

Although stakeholders are often present in advisory councils, at AQ Austria they are actually represented in the decision-making board. AQ's Austria's Board consists of experts from the area of higher education (4 international, 4 national), student representatives (1 international, 1 national) and professionals/employers (4). As a result, their Board may be seen as body that is reflecting stakeholders relevant for higher education.

4.6 Wider public audiences

The surveys of this study all approached stakeholders which were pre-determined. However, the UK agency explicitly involves a wider public, particularly the media, in its quality assurance. For instance, they communicate review outcomes to local, national, and international media. To spread their

messages, QAA not only uses its website, but posts news items on social media, too. To make sure this is implemented in a reliable way, they conduct strategic partnerships with the relevant media companies.

Other organisations also use the media to spread news, often because the quality of higher education and accreditation should be transparent. However, it is very important to maintain a professional reputation and/or identity. Therefore, (social) media should be used with caution. In this regard, NVAO could be used as an example. In 2013, NVAO spent much effort on its new strategic plan. A great part of the new strategy concerned NVAO's identity. NVAO's staff members were asked how they picture NVAO and how they prefer to be pictured by stakeholders and media. When an organization is well aware of its identity, tasks, reputation and values, it will eventually find a good way to communicate and cooperate with stakeholders.

Chapter V. The way forward

Stakeholders are part of the higher education process and have to participate in a regular and regulated way. Their role depends on the national context in different layers: the national legal framework, the academic tradition, and the higher education dynamics (public/private balance, role played by the government, professional bodies, etc.).

A lot has been achieved in many countries, but there is room for improvement. A number of issues of interest for a broader audience within ENQA have been identified by the working group, and they are submitted for the consideration of the Board for a further exploitation of the results:

- Stakeholders' participation in quality assurance practices in QA agencies has a big impact on their transparency and accountability
- QA agencies can act as a catalyser: roles clearly defined (respecting the division of responsibility among stakeholders)
- Stakeholder participation in the quality assurance policy results in co-responsibility and legitimacy of the process (and outcomes) of the QA agency and the HE system
- The incorporation of new stakeholders requires a need to structure the relationships among the different stakeholders in higher education
- The need to make a cross-cultural analysis among the different countries and sectors in the EHEA
- Stronger involvement of stakeholders could result in a potential clash with independence and the balance between them: the so-called "Involvement's dilemma".
- The development of a database of good practice according to the recommendations of the report.

The work will move to a more implementation-oriented phase and the composition of the group will need to be broadened. The benefits of involvement can be turned into recommendations for ENQA members and disseminated among the EHEA stakeholders. These recommendations or guidelines could take the shape of focal points that could be the agenda for the next few years and could contribute to increased stakeholders involvement and identification of the obstacles or challenges.

Appendices:

Appendix I. Stakeholder involvement survey

Introduction

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher education (ENQA), the European-wide body of higher education quality assurance agencies, is currently examining the nature and extent of engagement in quality assurance by stakeholders with a view to making recommendations to its board and to its nationally-based member agencies on how both can develop and deepen this engagement. As part of this process, we write to ask if you would be kind enough to assist us with

our initial research by indicating the level of your organisation's engagement in quality assurance of higher education in your country.

PART I. FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS ONLY

Question 1:

1.1 HAVE YOU OR YOUR INSTITUTION BEEN INVOLVED IN QUALITY ASSURANCE (of Higher Education) EITHER NOW OR IN THE PAST?

- ☐ Yes.
☐ No.

1.2 IF YES, HAVE YOU / YOUR ORGANISATION BEEN INVOLVED IN:

Please circle:

External quality assurance
Internal quality assurance
Both

1.3 IF NO, DO YOU THINK THAT YOU SHOULD BE INVOLVED?

- ☐ Yes.

If yes, in what sense or to what extent?

- ☐ No.

If no, why not?

PART II. QUESTIONS FOR ALL STAKEHOLDERS

Question 1:

1.1 ARE YOU / YOUR ORGANISATION INVOLVED IN HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE AS...?

Please circle those which apply:

- Academic/ Member of Staff in Higher Education Institution
- Student at Higher Education Institution
- Student Representative Organisation
- Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body
- Employer
- Employer Organisation
- Other (please specify)

1.2 PLEASE INDICATE THE EXTENT OF YOUR INVOLVEMENT.

Question 2:

CAN YOU DESCRIBE THE BENEFITS YOU/ YOUR ORGANISATION'S INVOLVEMENT HAS HAD ON IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION, GIVING EXAMPLES WHERE APPROPRIATE?

Question 3:

3.1 WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE MORE INVOLVED IN QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

- ☐ Yes.
☐ No.

3.2 If yes, please explain why. Please also explain how the nature and extent on your involvement in quality assurance can be improved, giving examples where appropriate

3.3 If no, can you explain why not?

Question 4:
OTHER SUGGESTIONS/ COMMENTS

Thank you for taking part.

Appendix II. Breakout session on Stakeholders' involvement. ENQA Member's Forum May 2013 (Prague)

1. What does "stakeholder" exactly mean for your agency?

The definition should include the labour market, enterprises and employers. quality assurance should include their perceptions on what quality is.

The question was raised whether the WG restrained to external quality assurance or also included IQA. The Group had also taken into account IQA.

The question of stakeholder involvement should go further, by including how quality assurance agencies raise awareness on quality assurance issue. Agencies should focus on defining better ways to increase public awareness on quality assurance. This could allow people who are important in decision-making to have knowledge on the agencies' work and, further, to be effectively involved in both external and internal quality assurance processes.

Romania: there is a special standing committee for stakeholders.

CTI, France: mixture of both academics and employers.

Rebalancing importance of stakeholders

If we list stakeholders, they are very similar for all agencies. What becomes interesting is the balance of importance of these stakeholders.

In UK, QAA has put a lot of effort in building up involvement of students and now wants to do the same with employers.

The stakeholders that are less involved are not less important, but the dialogue with them has not developed or they could not understand the language spoken by the agencies.

This is what was found by the group -> How to rebalance the involvement of all stakeholders with the use of good practice from other countries.

It is very important for the outside world to understand that universities have the tools to assure and improve their quality and the quality of education.

Actually, the real stakeholder is the whole society which is classified into groups. One finding of the study will be that different stakeholders have different types of involvement. Each group has different targets and needs concerning HE and their involvement could be linked with such targets. The question is how to balance different interests and targets and how to match the expectations and perspectives of each group.

The question is how to reach a common model to all countries.

Alumni are a specific type of stakeholder and a key group because they give both an inside and outside view. How to involve them or how is this occurring in some countries which

should be taken as an example? CTI sent a national survey to alumni and got 50,000 answers.

Some stakeholders are influential but less important and vice versa. The challenge for the agencies is to engage these stakeholders. Influential stakeholders are often ignored.

In Ireland, there is a non-academic panel in the expert teams, often from the public service.

There is undeniably added-value of involving stakeholders because they bring different perspectives. The question is how to balance them. SI should be both on IQA and EQA.

2. How do you involve the labour market?

Very often in the governance process, but this is not sufficient.

The discussion mainly focused on labour market representatives' engagement in quality assurance.

Emphasis on the need to reshape employers' involvement: they should have something to say about the quality of graduates and even evaluate their competences.

The group most effectively involved in quality assurance has been that of students. On the contrary, employers are little involved.

Regarding involvement it should be taken into consideration the more vocational or broader type of HE. Different types of HE provided by HEIs raise the interest of different stakeholders groups.

UK: QAA makes sure that all quality assurance framework procedures are the result of a consultative process. There is a much bigger problem of lack of awareness of quality assurance among stakeholders. The agency has made a conscious effort to become more engaged with the broader public and involved in a wider political discussion. The risk of being publicly prominent is an increase of transparency that the institutions may criticise because it can affect their reputation.

The agencies work in detail and it is difficult to adapt to the broader picture expected at political level. It is important to present things as simple as possible to the outside world. Communication is the key word.

3. For your organisation, what are the two or three main challenges in involving stakeholders in the immediate future?

The challenge is to find people who are active, interested and available. These 3 aspects have to be combined.

Another challenge is to achieve effective involvement of stakeholders in quality assurance processes (ex. students are not easily mobilised).

The WG indeed wondered how to involve the non-true-believers.

It is important to dialogue with people and get their views on what should be their involvement and then introduce changes so that they can see their claims are taken into consideration.

How to engage politicians is also a challenge since they represent specific and different parts of the public interested in HE. Politicians cannot be ignored because they represent the society but at the same time it is important to remain independent.

In the UK, there have been a very interesting dialogue with the stakeholders asking them “how would a quality assurance system look like if you designed it”? The 2 main challenges in the UK are managing the risk of greater public prominence and respond to the needs of 4 countries in a single framework for quality assurance.

The society wants control, accountability and value for money. On the other side, quality assurance process should not get too bureaucratic and expensive. Agencies are sandwiched between trust and control. The challenge is to combine these 2 aspects which should not be contradictory.

Teachers are rarely trained to be evaluated by their peers. Time is needed to see improvement there.

Inter-relationship between stake holding and funding could be addressed. Some stakeholders in the governance of agencies are also funders. In England, the HE sector is changing shape and Further Education Colleges will become funders of QAA. There is also a significant amount of new income by private HEI -> new funders. How should that be reflected in the governance? In the UK, they are struggling to get the governance match the funding.

4. The Bucharest Communiqué requests the E4 Group to strengthen the cooperation with Education International and Business Europe. Has your agency/organisation already contacted or involved your national counterparts?

General answer is “not really”. No in the UK. Good engagement in Ireland but less with Irish federation of Teachers.

Appendix III. Report on involvement of the labour market in the quality assurance of higher education

By Paul Zevenbergen and Carolien Hennekam, NVAO (September 2013)

Introduction

The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher education (ENQA), the European-wide body of higher education QA agencies, is currently examining the nature and extent of stakeholder involvement in quality assurance of higher education. As part of the initial research, stakeholders from several European countries completed a survey and were asked to explain their vision and extent of stakeholders’ involvement and how this could be improved.

Various stakeholders have been approached: academic staff, evaluation agencies, ministries, students, employers' organisations, employees’ organisations, etc. Stakeholders were selected with regard to the current state of affairs concerning stakeholder involvement in the countries participating in this study. First results show that in general, all stakeholders find themselves quite involved in the quality assurance of higher education. The employers’ organisations are an exception: overall, they indicate their involvement as insufficient and wish to be more involved. These results raise questions. Is this the case for all participating organisations? And, what challenges and possibilities are there to strengthen the involvement of the working field?

The present report attempts to answer these questions. On one hand, it gives an overview of the outcomes of the survey focused on the working field. The results are shown per organisation and country. Both the current situation regarding the involvement of the employers in the quality assurance of education and the desired situation are explained. On the other hand, the report compares the types of employers' involvement in different agencies and countries. Finally, the report gives a possible follow up of the discussion regarding the involvement of the working field.

Results on a European level

The Agency for Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Education (A3ES) - Portugal

The Portuguese quality assessment system ensures the participation of external bodies. These bodies are the professional councils and other public professional associations as well as other scientific, cultural, and economic entities (Law 38/2007).

The involvement of such bodies in quality assessment is foreseen to happen namely in external assessment, during the visits of the EATs to the HEIs (study programmes), through the presence of their representatives in the meetings with these panels. There is a specific meeting designed for the auscultation of external stakeholders (national/regional labour market representatives, for instance) selected by the HEI and promoted with the aim to collect their opinions on the study programmes. Professional councils and associations also collaborate in quality assessment by advising on the accreditation of study programmes belonging to the areas relevant to the scope of action of each council (A3ES 2010). The final accreditation decision of the A3ES Board of Directors will consider, where appropriate, not only the EAT's recommendation but also the written opinion of the relevant professional councils and associations.

Further, professional councils and associations' representatives integrate a specific body of the agency: the Advisory Council. This is a body advising on matters related to quality assurance and giving support to the decisions of the A3ES Board of Directors. Specifically, the Advisory Council issues opinions on the agency's annual action plan, main activities, and strategic orientation.

The Portuguese employers would like to be more involved in the quality assurance of higher education. This could contribute to the dissemination of a quality culture among trade union members, to a better monitoring of the academics' recruitment and working conditions within HEIs and, therefore, to ensure the quality of academics.

The Accreditation Organisation of The Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) – The Netherlands

In The Netherlands employers are involved in several ways. First of all, their perspective must be expressed in expert panels. Secondly, NVAO has informal contacts and meetings with employers' organisations such as VNO-NCW. Therefore NVAO's General Board is aware of employers' needs, even though employers are not directly represented in the Board.

Although employers' organisations indicate their involvement as small, they claim that the added value can be described as "the bridge between higher education and the professional field". They have insight as to what is needed in the labour market. In this way they improve the adequacy of a specific programme with the requirements for job accession. In brief, they have a "fresh" view of quality assurance from the employer's perspective.

Employers' organisations in The Netherlands wish to be more involved in quality assurance of higher education. First of all, they prefer clearer agreements between employers and higher education. They wish for a more structured framework in which both parties are able to make specific agreements concerning relations between higher education and the professional field. Secondly, they emphasise the importance of the link between education and the labour market. They want to

support the universities of applied science in order to make sure that the professional field can benefit from qualified graduates. Unfortunately, they say, this is difficult to realise, as universities of applied science tend to offer programmes which are not relevant for the current labour market needs. This should be improved.

Finally, there were some positive comments. For example, they were positive about their involvement concerning the new NVAO accreditation frameworks, though they contend their role in the actual accreditation process is limited.

The Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria) – Austria

As of 1 March 2012 external quality assurance in Austria is regulated by a new legislation - Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (HS-QSG) - that defines the types of external quality assurance for the different sectors of higher education (postsecondary HEIs). With the legal validity of the HS-QSG a new and single agency, Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria), which is responsible for external quality assurance in the higher education sector, was established. According to this legislation, all relevant stakeholders form the General Meeting.

In Austria, both the Federal Chamber of Labour and the Federation of Austrian Industries have been involved in the decision-making body of one of the predecessor bodies of AQ Austria – the Austrian Fachhochschule Council (FHR). Concerning the feedback of the Federal Chamber of Labour, due to the composition of the General Meeting, relevant questions concerning labour market and societal issues cannot be addressed adequately. Only six out of 23 members of the General Meeting come from the so-called “social partners” (representatives in the General Meeting are nominated by the Advisory Council for Economic and Social Affairs). Due to this particular distribution of power, interests of the labour market seemed not adequately addressed in the bodies and committees of AQ Austria.

However, the involvement of the Austrian labour market led to a constant exchange with other stakeholders concerning relevant questions and issues within higher education in Austria. As a stakeholder concerned with labour market relevant issues, concrete input on conditions for studying (especially part-time students), employability, and further societal questions related to higher education was provided. In addition it was mentioned that the involvement in external quality assurance offers the possibility to gain insight into internal organisational structures of HEIs.

The Austrian representatives of the labour market would prefer a stronger involvement in the decision-making structures of AQ Austria and would like to have the possibility to stress societal issues and labour market questions.

The Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (SKVC) – Lithuania

In Lithuania, employers are involved in the advisory bodies of SKVC and in expert panels. Employers are being interviewed by expert panels during site visits to HEIs. The quality of Lithuanian education benefits from this involvement. Enhancement of training of professionals at all educational levels is considered by employers as one of the main priorities. Employers’ representatives indicate that periodical internships of teaching staff and practical placement of students in innovative companies must be supported and strengthened.

Employers’ involvement in internal quality assurance of HEIs has been encouraged for many years. They are involved as members of HEIs’ management boards and study programme committees and have meetings and discussions with those responsible for programme management, etc. However, according to both the agency and the representatives of Lithuanian employers further efforts are required.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) – United Kingdom

In the UK, employers are involved in the quality assurance of higher education. For example, the QAA involves employer representatives and professional, statutory, and regulatory bodies in the revision and development of subject benchmark statements, they are consulted and advised about developments in the quality assurance of work-based learning and employer engagement in higher education, and they are asked to comment on such developments. Also, the UK Quality Code for Higher Education includes a range of references to higher education providers' engagement and collaboration with employers. Finally, the QAA produces guides to help employers (and the wider public) to understand the qualifications, skills, and study environment of today's graduates.

QAA Review reports include both commendations and recommendations regarding these matters, the preparation of students for employment and the employability of graduates. Institutions' action plans must address the recommendations formulated in these reviews. Also, QAA reviews its reports to identify good practices and recommendations.

Some universities and colleges engage employers and their representative organisations, at course, subject, and institutional levels. QAA is aware that some employers have concerns about employability skills of graduates. There is also doubt expressed by some employers about varying standards between institutions and also between courses. QAA seeks to work with as wide a range of employers as possible in the revision and development of subject benchmark statements. Overall, British employers' organisations would welcome a more direct involvement to complement already existing activities.

Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) – Kosovo

In Kosovo, the involvement of the working field is quite limited. They are represented only on a few faculty boards and are insufficiently involved in the process of curriculum design. The respondents of the survey suggest that KAA establish contacts with employers (business partners) in order to link them to higher education.

The National Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation (ANECA) – Spain

The employers are indirectly represented on ANECA's Board of Trustees through the social councils of the public universities. These councils are part of the governing bodies of the public universities in Spain, and their presidents and some members come from the labour market. The objective of the councils is twofold: to involve society as a whole and the labour market representatives in the institution to set up bridges of collaboration and to engage them in the decision-making process of the academic offer of the university in order to strengthen the influence of professional practice in the programmes.

ANECA and the Conference of Social Councils are running working groups on topics of the agenda of these bodies, and in 2011 a report on the Permanency Rules of the Universities was jointly issued. The President of the Conference of the Social Councils of Public Universities, an employer himself, is a member of the Board of Trustees of ANECA.

Furthermore, in the Advisory Board of the Agency, two representatives of the Spanish trade unions of university professors and administrative staff are seated and take part in the discussions about technical issues related to the procedures run by ANECA, especially with those that deal directly with the evaluation of individual academic staff to raise the opinions and worries coming from the sector. Concerning the expert committees in ANECA's evaluation procedures, the values of the Bologna declaration concerning the focus of the programmes on employability are represented in the evaluation committees of ANECA in the programme-accreditation procedure when the procedure

was designed in 2007. ANECA's Board of Directors made the decision to include a representative of the labour/professional field as an expert in the panels in every committee of the various scientific areas (health sciences, arts and humanities, sciences, engineering and architecture, and social and legal sciences).

Finally, [ANECA's Strategic Plan 2013-2016](#), includes the involvement of stakeholders at the level of procedure design and information activities. Specific objective A3, deals with the need to involve stakeholders in the design and implementation on quality assurance and accreditation procedures and specific objective C1 states that the relevant information on the higher education system provided by ANECA must be easily accessible according to the profile of each stakeholder.

ANECA has identified in its 2012 self-evaluation report the need to formalise and strengthen its direct relationship with employers' associations and representatives at the national level. The step taken with the social councils explained above is only one minor part – but stressed by the University Act – of the whole approach.

Agency for Quality Assurance in the Galician University System (ACSUG) – Spain

In the Galician quality assurance of higher education, employers are involved in the Board of Directors, the Advisory Board and in evaluation committees. In 2007 the agency conducted research to determine employers' needs (ACSUG intends to make it a regular practice). Also, employers are trained for conducting reviews. The universities usually sign agreements with employers concerning several topics, for example, practicalities for students and developing research projects.

Galician employers wish to be more involved in the quality assurance of higher education. They would prefer more contact between the universities and the business sector in order to establish a greater correspondence between the curricula and the needs of the labour market. An example could be to improve the organisation of students' placements in companies or to provide students with more information about the relevant business sector during their studies.

Estonian Higher Education Quality Agency (EKKA) – Estonia

In Estonian quality assurance of higher education, the working field is involved in the process of developing procedures for external evaluations. During development of requirements and procedures for institutional accreditation and assessment of study programme groups, a study was conducted where employers were interviewed concerning their expectations on quality of higher education and aims of quality assurance. Also, there is at least one representative from the labour market on each assessment panel. Finally, employers are represented in the Quality Assessment Council (the decision-making body).

During all types of assessments, HEIs need to demonstrate employers' involvement in different activities: curriculum development, research and development activities, etc.

Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute (ACQUIN) – Germany

In Germany, both employers' associations and labour unions are involved in the quality assurance of higher education. The Confederation of German Employers' Associations nominates and assists employers in the Accreditation Council (the central decision-making body of the "Foundation for the Accreditation of Study Programs in Germany"). Also, it participates in working groups of the council and nominates peers for the accreditation procedures of accreditation agencies. Some representatives are also members of university advisory councils. Labour unions and their members are involved in quality assurance/accreditation procedures as peers, by having representatives in the Accreditation Council and in some QA agencies.

Regional employers' associations and regional employers also have representatives who are members of university advisory councils, especially in those universities that are offering study programmes in close cooperation with companies. Some representatives are also members of committees of QA agencies and nominate peers for accreditation procedures or are peers themselves. The coordination of the search for peers for accreditation procedures is not centralised. This task remains solely with the QA agencies.

Not only in external quality assurance practices but also in internal ones is the external point of view able to deliver information to detect quality deficits and to develop innovative solutions. Furthermore, just in interaction between HEIs and employers the following questions can be answered: What connection exists between a study programme and professional practices? How are students assisted with their employment search upon graduation? In what way does the transfer of knowledge between research and regional economy work? Exchange between HEIs and employers about new study concepts is seen as very important. Employers involved as peers in accreditation procedures appreciate gaining an overview of the quality of study programmes.

As far as the labour unions are concerned, the quality of teaching and learning can be improved from the employees' point of the view. The interests of the students and employees are not represented only in institutions, but also in the public and private organisations. Labour unions contribute to the definition of qualifications' objectives, the rules of quality assurance procedures, standards, and criteria. Organised in a network at the national level, some of the labour unions contribute to comparable quality assurance practices. The network holds regular meetings in which the development of quality assurance practices is discussed. Its members are trained to take part in peer accreditation procedures.

There is already a broad involvement of employers' representatives in advisory boards of universities and committees of QA agencies. However, this has not yet been generalised to the whole higher education system. It is the responsibility of each institution to involve employers in their practices. Quality assurance needs to adapt to the each given institution, its profile, its structure, and its processes. Therefore it is not possible to give any suggestion for correct quality assurance models. As employers' involvement in quality assurance practices requires a lot of time, it is difficult to sustain. A broader exchange between the employers at the European level is therefore recommended.

From the employees' point of view, both employees and employers should be involved in peer groups at the same time. It should be possible to take part in quality assurance practices as peers without having constraints, especially financial ones. The involvement of employers in (further) development of study programmes should be made obligatory for the institutions.

Swiss Center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (OAQ)

In Switzerland the situation is diverse; in general the involvement of employers and professional organisations in the branch of universities of applied Science is more important than in the branch of universities. Moreover the nature and level of involvement varies evidently with the field; whereas in engineering or pharmacy the link between higher education and industry is quite obvious and direct, the situation for the humanities is more challenging. Besides, in the field of postgraduate and continuous education, studies and courses are often directly adapted to the needs of the labour market.

This diverse picture is also reflected in external quality assurance. In expert panels for accreditation and evaluation in the fields of universities of applied sciences and postgraduate training there is usually one representative from the professional field, and relevant employers are interviewed during the procedures. This is not the case for universities.

However, employers' organisations and unions are involved in a working group preparing the new accreditation guidelines according to the new Federal Law on Encouragement and Coordination in the Higher Education Sector (HFKG) which will come into force in Switzerland at the beginning of 2015. OAQ maintains and tries to develop contact with employers and professional organisations, but there is still room for improvement, the direct involvement being low at the moment. There are plans to include an employers' representative in the Board.

Last, but not least, since Switzerland is a small country with a so far relatively strong economy and a sound labour market with low unemployment rates, there is at the moment no pestering mismatch observable between higher education and the labour market.

2. Emerged patterns

Both the current state of affairs and the outcomes of the ENQA survey show many similarities among the organisations participating in the research. Overall, QA agencies see the need to involve the working field in both internal and external quality assurance. In most agencies, employers are involved in expert teams. In some cases they are also represented in agencies' boards. However, there seems to be a lack of formal relationships with the professional bodies and employers. In some cases involvement is an essential part of quality assurance, and this contributes to the quality of programmes or faculties. On the other hand, in some organisations the involvement of the working field is not (yet) structurally organised.

Meanwhile, results of the survey show that no matter what the exact current situation is, the involvement of the working field can be strengthened. This is the case for both internal and external quality assurance.

3. The way forward

In order to gain more insight into specific ideas and suggestions from the approached stakeholders of the working field, NVAO organised a personal interview with an advisor in economic affairs and education of the Dutch umbrella organisations of employers (VNO-NCW and MKB). This interview took place in The Hague, on 11 July 2013. The paragraphs below contain a brief summary of the mentioned interview.

The first point of discussion concerned the difference between stakeholder involvement in regional and central-oriented education. In The Netherlands, higher education is often regionally oriented, and this is a fact that should be taken into account while discussing the involvement of the labour market. For example, when a student in engineering obtains his diploma in a university in a certain city, his skills and experiences are different from a student who obtains the exact same diploma in another city, or even the countryside. Because *region* is a determining factor (institutions design their own learning outcomes), the question is raised whether it is possible and/or desirable to establish guidelines for working field involvement at a central level.

A second point of discussion was about specific ideas from the working field to increase their involvement in quality assurance. Because the involvement of the working field is not assessed in a structured way, there is not enough transparency. In the ideal situation, the representative says, this should be taken on an integral level. In terms of quality, this means that it would be useful in a programme evaluation not only to look at the question of whether there *is* a field commission, but how it *looks*: who the representatives are and what their actual work is.

As a result of this interview, several agreements have been made. First, it has been agreed to have more interviews of this kind, in order to keep each other up to date. Secondly, in order to discuss the

involvement of the working field at the national level, the Commission Higher Education should have meetings more frequently. NVAO will be present during the next meeting in September.